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BLESSED IMELDA LAMBERTINI, O.P.

BLESSED
IMELDA LAMBERTINI
VIRGIN OF THE DOMINICAN ORDER

FROM THE FRENCH OF
RENÉE ZELLER

WITH A PREFACE

BY

W. ROCHE, S.J.

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PREFACE

THERE is, I believe, no name of any young saint, barring perhaps the Early Martyrs, more familiar to the ears and on the lips of our First Communicants than that of Blessed Imelda. And yet no life—no complete biography—not, at least, any volume all to herself, seems to have been ever published in English.

The one outstanding incident of her short life—the miracle of her first and last Holy Communion—has been enough to enshrine her in the affectionate sympathy of all our Little People. They cherish her memory, they rejoice in her happy experience, with a touch, no doubt, of innocent envy, in that they would themselves also gladly taste the immense, delicious sweetness of Divine love and be carried off at once, like her, to live in Paradise with Our Lord for ever.

For some six hundred years this incident of her one and only Communion on earth has kept Imelda's memory fresh and green. It will live on, we may be sure, to the end of time in the heavenly heart of childhood. Still, though the little maid's fame is already secure,

all her clients—that is, every Catholic child—will be glad to hear the full story of her brief life. It will reassure them that Blessed Imelda's story is not legendary, but genuine and solid history ; also that, through all the centuries, however much conventions and social customs and methods of education may change, one thing remains stable and unchanged, and that is the Divine attraction that draws the unspoilt heart of childhood into the adorable arms of Our Blessed Lord, the Saviour of Mankind and “ Nurse of infant loves.”

In reconstructing this story of Blessed Imelda, the author has been careful to build the narrative on the facts of recorded history, filling in the gaps, when needful, from a general knowledge of the period with a devout and historic imagination.

The curious or more exacting reader will be glad to know that the Bollandists record all the chief facts on which this book is based : viz. the names of Imelda's father and mother ; her birth in answer to prayer ; the traditions of her piety as an infant and small child ; her devotion to a shrine of Our Lady in her father's garden ; her entrance into the convent of Valdi Pietra at the age of nine ; the fact of her often begging the chaplain for Holy Communion and his refusal on account of her

youth ; the edification she gave to her community ; and the miraculous circumstances of her First Communion and death. The Bollandists quote the account by John Lambertini mentioned in the text, and the other documents of her Beatification.

W. R.

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CHAPTER I

HOW THE VIRGIN IMELDA HEARD THE VOICE OF CHRIST

“Thy name is as oil poured out : therefore young maidens have loved Thee.”—(Canticle of Canticles, I. 2.)

IMELDA, whose baptismal name is said by some chronicles to have been Maria Maddalena, was born at Bologna, Italy, in the year 1322. Her father, Count Egano Lambertini, was an excellent Catholic, said by a contemporary writer to have been a man full of faith and of a kind-hearted nature. He was a person of some importance in his native city of Bologna, being captain-general of the town garrison ; and the wardenship of one of the city fortresses was also entrusted to him. The Lambertini family had a precious tradition of faith and virtue inherited through long ages, and this was carried on not only in Imelda, but at the date of her birth by her aunt, her father's sister, Donna Massima de Ramiero Caccianemici. Donna Massima was left a widow while still young and very beautiful ; her husband had been rich and she inherited all his wealth. One day, Christ Himself seemed to her to be, as it were, standing before the eyes of her soul

and gazing at her, whereat Massima wept bitterly, not from fear of hell, but because she had disregarded Love Itself. From that hour she went about her native town filled with apostolic zeal, urging on all her worldly friends a life of penance. Soon she had attracted no less than forty-nine ladies of good family to follow the Crucified; and, at her request, the Bishop gave her an ancient monastic building attached to the Church of St. Thomas, where she enclosed herself along with her companions. She lived for another twenty years, setting to all an example of sharp penance rendered sweet by heavenly love. Massima died in the year 1344, and all the people considered her a saint.

Castora Galluzzi, Imelda's mother, had merited the gift of her daughter by her tender piety and perseverance in prayer. During the first years of her marriage she had no children, and would often retire to her private oratory, and with tears beseech the intercession of the Mother of God, specially offering the rosary prayers for this intention. We may believe, too, that the pious friars and nuns whom she numbered among her relatives would join their holy supplications to hers: the Augustinian Napoleone Galluzzi; the Dominican Friar Egidio Galluzzi (afterwards Archbishop of Crete); and the Mother

Foundress of the Franciscan convent of SS. Luigi and Alexis ; besides others of her family who had also embraced the religious state.

Thus it was that in answer to all these prayers the little Imelda entered this world as a child of predestination, with all heavenly graces ready and waiting for her in her very cradle.

She was a charming baby, and from the first it was observed by those who surrounded her how remarkably serene and sweet-tempered she always was. Her Aunt Massima, who had not yet left the world, would try to attract her notice with the glitter of jewels and trinkets, but the child would give one glance out of her large quiet eyes and then turn far more readily to the great wooden beads of the rosary which hung over the white habit of her Dominican Uncle Fra Egidio.

If some baby-pain or trouble made her cry, it was soon discovered that the quickest way to soothe her was for her mother or attendants to repeat softly the Holy Name of Jesus, as they rocked her cradle. At the sound of the Most Blessed Name, little Imelda's tears would cease, and she would fall asleep gently in the shade of her heavily-embroidered curtains.

The Count and Countess Lambertini observed with pious thankfulness these signs of

grace thus early in the little life of their only child: but they were wise as well as pious, and knew well that all might be in vain and might quickly pass off as their little one grew older, unless she were wisely and lovingly guarded from carelessness and dissipation; and they did their best to train the flower that God had sent them to open its petals and shed its perfume for Him alone.

When Imelda reached the age of reason she had already learned to look lovingly at the Crucifix, and to respond in her heart to the Great Love of her God. At the age of seven or eight she had begun to love solitude, and to wish to deprive herself of vain enjoyment or self-indulgence even in the most innocent matters, for fear of losing the longing for God and the unspeakable joy of His Presence in her soul.

It is told of her, that during the long Italian summers the little girl would wake as soon as the first rays of sunrise fell on her bed, and after saying the Sacred Name of Jesus, would quickly dress herself and go quietly down to the garden, leaving the rest of the household slumbering.

In the garden there was a rustic shrine of Our Blessed Lady, to which Imelda had a remarkable devotion. Before this holy image, in those early summer mornings six hundred

years ago, very wonderful mysteries were revealed by the Holy Ghost to the innocent soul of this little child.

Imelda would kneel on the hard ground before Our Lady, and begin by saying the rosary as her mother had taught her; but soon the beads would slip from her small fingers, and Our Lord, whose life she had been considering in the mysteries of the rosary, would seem so living and so close to her that she could only murmur words of love and give herself up to the joy of His Presence. Her parents, meanwhile, if they found her bed empty, knew well where to look for her; and when they came to recall her to the house, Imelda was quite untroubled; she would at once obey their summons, and knew that He whom she loved would be with her throughout the day. She would next greet Him on the Altar, when Donna Castora took her to Mass. Sometimes this was in the chapel of some convent or monastery, where His servants served Him behind a grille, where they dwelt apart from the world. The child would gaze longingly, at the moment of the Elevation, at the Body of Our Saviour born of Mary.

There were no printed books in those days, and no books specially for children to learn from; and as we are told that Imelda could read at a very early age, we may think of her

learning her letters from some page of an illuminated missal or antiphonary. There she would often smile at finding a picture of Him whom she loved, painted in bright colours on a gold background, perhaps surrounded by a choir of singing virgins, by saints in ecstasy, or by angels tirelessly swinging censers filled with the incense of prayer. But yet, in the corners of the pages or among the Gothic foliage of the great coloured capitals, ugly monsters would peep out, their horns and serpent-coils like vivid warnings of the temptations and distractions ever present to entice and endanger souls ; then Imelda would long to go and be shut up safely in some happy garden of God, like the innocent lambs she found pictured further on in her book, browsing on flowers to represent virtues, in a mystic *Hortus conclusus*.

When her uncle, the learned Fra Napoleone, came to see his small niece, he would often find her sitting on a little stool, a Psalter open on her lap, her chin resting on her hand, meditating seriously over the sacred text. The child would hand him her book, and beg him to explain the Divine words to her, all attention to the teaching of one whom she knew to be a special servant of God.

Her mother taught her while very young how to spin and sew, to make garments for the

poor. She would offer her work and the handling of the coarse wool very gladly to Jesus, who is poor in His poor ones; but she rather wistfully envied her mother and aunts, whom she saw skilfully embroidering golden crosses or silver lambs for His very Altar.

After working and studying diligently for some hours, Imelda's favourite recreation was to visit the many churches and convents of Bologna in her mother's company; for all she saw in them reminded her of her Heavenly Lover.

Sometimes they visited her Aunt Massima in her cloistered home, where all spoke of the cross and of holy austerity, where she saw her aunt's beautiful face worn with fasting and watching, yet full of happiness; like the Sulamitess with her face burnt with the shining of the sun of love. Sometimes it was to see the Abbess Gisela that she was taken, and to the child she seemed most serenely dignified in her coarse serge and with bare feet: so that Imelda would have very gladly exchanged all the riches of the Palazzo Lambertini for the cold cell where this daughter of St. Francis lived alone with Christ.

But the time the child loved best was the evening hour, when Donna Castora often took her to Compline in the Church of the Dominican Friars. After the final blessing, a slight

sound would be heard in the choir and all the friars, who till then had remained invisible, slowly left their stalls, coming two by two in procession into the public part of the church, while the sweet notes of the *Salve Regina*, sung with religious fervour, rose toward Heaven. Imelda would try and sing with them as her Uncle Egidio had taught her, "*Eia, ergo, Advocata nostra,*" to Our Blessed Lady. "Turn thine eyes of mercy towards us," humbly prayed these men: their word was often powerful; they were everywhere sought for as illustrious preachers; but all knelt lowly before their Sovereign Lady. Her image was there, with an acolyte holding a torch on either side of Her, and they felt Her Presence among them, giving them Her blessing, that their watching might be fervent and their slumber peaceful; that She might spread Her sapphire mantle over them, a safe refuge from all perils of the darkness: "*O Clemens, O Pia, O Dulcis Virgo Maria.*" Then the friars would rise, and go in religious order and silence to the tomb at the end of the church where their father Dominic sleeps, with the star still shining above his brow.

When they left the church night would have fallen, and as Imelda held her mother's hand she would look up at the clear dark-blue sky set with golden stars. The noises of the city,

the busy groups of people, and the voices of the parties of students from the university would seem unreal and far away ; and under the blue mantle of Mary and the shining star of Dominic, Imelda would pray the prayer of David : “ As the hart panteth after the fountains of water, so my soul panteth after Thee, O God.” (Ps. xli. 1.)

After such fashion as this, Imelda's days were spent in her parents' home, from about her sixth to her ninth year. Grace and peace seemed to follow her footsteps ; surrounded by love and care her presence seemed to bring good to all who knew her ; to servants and household as to her father and mother.

But no earthly happiness, however pure, is meant to be lasting ; the shadow of the cross falls soon on the best and most devout lives : and so it was now.

A day came, about the time of Imelda's ninth birthday, when all the household noticed a strange sadness and disquietude on the countenance of the good Count Egano, and he and the Lady Castora were seen to be often in tears as they knelt at prayer in church or in their private oratory.

The reason of this was soon known : one evening when Imelda had knelt as usual for her parents' good-night blessing, she had remained on her knees before them, while she

implored them to take her at once to some cloister where she might dwell as a virgin consecrated to Jesus.

And thus the joy of the Lambertini family was turned into sorrow.

To this little girl of nine years old had come the call, the summons to leave all, to take up the Cross and follow Jesus. Already she heard the mystic invitation to drink the secret wine in the cellar of Love: and the accents of that Voice made her deaf to the calls of nature and of home affection.

The Count and Countess Lambertini were too sincerely pious to wish to resist God's Will in their child's regard; they well knew that she was His far more than she was theirs.

Of all the convents of Bologna, that of the Dominican Nuns of Val di Pietra, on a hill outside the city, seemed to them the most worthy to receive their treasure, their virginal offering to Our Lord. They themselves led their only child thither. At the final moment of farewell Imelda turned to receive their last kiss; she was as pale as a lily, but her eyes, though full of tears, yet shone with an eager longing; that sacred impatience of which the great Dante sang: "O quickly, quickly! that no time be lost through lack of love." ("Il Purgatorio," Canto XVIII, line 103.)

CHAPTER II

THE GARDEN ENCLOSED OF THE VAL DI PIETRA

“ I sat down under His shadow whom I desired, and His fruit was sweet to my palate.”—(Canticle of Canticles, II, 3.)

THE Prioress of the Dominican convent of St. Mary Magdalen was seated in the Chapter House below the great Crucifix. All the nuns were standing in order before their stalls.

After the prayer of invocation to the Holy Ghost, they waited, looking towards the door, which was presently opened slowly and carefully as if by a childish hand. Imelda then entered, still in worldly dress, and advancing to the middle of the room, prostrated herself at the feet of the virgins of Christ. “ What dost thou ask ? ” questioned the Prioress. “ The mercy of God, and yours,” replied the child. She lay there, her little body lying lightly on the earth, a little dove who had fluttered into God’s holy ark.

The voice of the Prioress was heard after a brief silence, a kind voice with a motherly tone in its speech. She explained, as the Rule provides, all the austerities of the Dominican vocation ; in order to prepare God’s little

athlete for what lay before her: the utter poverty of Christ's brides, depriving them of even the least private preferences or desires; the purity which fences the soul as with a hedge of thorns; the strict obedience which means death to all self-will; and next, the severe silence of the cloister, making of it a desert, where the soul must dwell apart; the manual labour; the fasting and watching; the corporal austerities and continual humiliations.

Imelda longed to embrace all these things; she saw in them as it were the fruit of His Passion offered to her by her Lord, and when she rose to answer with fervent acquiescence, her little face shone with joy.

Next, she came lightly forward to lean her childish head against the Prioress' knee, while the latter cut off her long hair. Then the veil of a bride of Christ was put on her head, and it seemed to her as though she were receiving it from the very hands of Our Blessed Lady Herself, as also the scapular, the girdle, the mantle; signs to her of purity, strength, humility. Henceforth she would be as a living victim offered to Eternal Truth, helping to keep burning brightly those torches carried by her elder brothers, the Friars Preachers, to enlighten the dim shades of death in which so many souls lose their way.

When the bell rang for Vespers, Sister Imelda walked in her rank as last of the novitiate. We are told she was considered tall for her age, and as moreover, in those times it was in no way unusual for children to be early admitted to religion, she would not appear different from the other novices, unless it were by the innocence and seriousness of her expression.

Before Compline was sung the nuns went to the refectory, where they drank, standing, the portion that was their appointed collation on days of fasting, with a short prayer before and after. If what the chronicles tell us is to be taken literally, that Imelda followed all the austerities of the Rule from the very first day of her entrance into religion, then she must have had nothing besides this more than frugal refection. She would not have minded, for though, according to Dominican custom, there would have been no Crucifix in the refectory, yet, there on the wall before her was a quaintly painted representation of the Last Supper; and she could feel that the Divine Companion was present, and was giving to her the blessing asked for; then, raising her cup in both hands, as she saw the other nuns do, she drank slowly, realising that she was in His Presence; and as she looked at the picture her thoughts went back to that first Holy

Thursday, and a hunger arose in her soul for the Most Blessed Sacrament.

“Our help is in the Name of the Lord,” was said aloud, and all responded, “Who hath made Heaven and earth.” Then all went in silence to the church.

To find herself in choir, close to the Tabernacle, and, as it were, in the private circle of Christ’s lovers, made Imelda feel as if she were in a very court of Heaven itself, surrounded by the choirs of angels.

Unused as yet to reciting the Divine Office, she did her best to imitate the actions of those near her, kneeling, rising, bowing down as they did, so as to unite herself as well as she could with their more complete praises: “He that dwelleth in the aid of the Most High, shall abide under the protection of the God of Heaven”: “He shall say to the Lord, Thou art my Protector and my Refuge; my God, in Him will I trust. . . .” (Ps. xc.) The Compline Psalms and prayers were ended, but the nuns still remained kneeling in their stalls, for this was the hour appointed for mental prayer, the intimate colloquy between each soul and its God. Imelda found the time all too short, she had no need for a book or even for a sentence of Holy Scripture on which to found her meditation on this first evening of her religious life: her heart was too full, and

she longed to pour out her grateful love to Him who had thus early in her life transplanted her into His House ; she felt it so dear and wonderful thus to be loved by Jesus with a special love, she would willingly have spent this first night of her espousals at His Feet. But the signal was given all too soon, and obedience obliged her to descend from her Tabor and follow her Sisters to the dormitory.

The fresh night breeze blew through the open arches of the cloister as they passed along. Imelda took the rosary that hung from her girdle, for all around her was full of the atmosphere of prayer. One small lamp burning before the Crucifix made fitful shadows on the vaulted roof, in many niches of the walls were sculptured images of saints, and out-of-doors in the middle of the cloister a large statue of Our Lady with her Divine Child in her arms was outlined against the starry sky. A fountain played below the statue, a type of those graces ever flowing from the Mother of God and men.

At the top of the wide stone stair which led to the dormitory Imelda saw the statue of her holy father, St. Dominic, with a lily in his hand, and the votive lamp which burned at his feet, served to guide his nuns to their place of rest.

Soon came the last bell, and the whole monastery, enwrapped in silence, seemed to

slumber under the guardianship of angels ; each nun in her separate cell.

But Sister Imelda lay awake on her hard little bed ; was it the hardness that prevented her sleeping, or the unwonted sensation of lying down in her religious Habit worn according to the Rule by night as well as by day ? No, her youth and the tiring and exciting day she had spent would have prevented such mortifications as these from being any hindrance to healthy slumbers ; it was another cause that kept her wakeful when silence descended on the dormitory. Poor little Imelda had never before gone to bed without her mother's good-night kiss, and the enemy of souls took occasion of the fearful wave of homesickness that swept over her, to suggest many a temptation to the poor child's mind. The silence, for one thing, oppressed her : she longed for the sound of the many bells in the city of Bologna, for the cheerful noises and voices to which she was accustomed ; out here in the country the stillness seemed desolate, and she longed to get out of the enclosing wall and return to the happy sounds of home. Then she thought of her father and mother all alone ; of her own little empty bed ; of her mother's tears ; and all the joy of her sacrifice turned to bitterness ; her Lord and Lover seemed far away, and all the sweetness of her

hour in the chapel had vanished. Imelda sobbed on her hard pillow. But the child's valiant will did not give way, nor did her Angel forsake his charge; she recognised the temptation, and knew that her suffering was as a bundle of myrrh to cast before her Lord's wounded Feet.

It was as if she heard the voice of the Bride of the Canticles: "Arise, O North Wind,"—the bitter wind of temptation and of trial,—“and blow through my garden,”—the garden of my soul,—“and let the aromatical spices thereof flow” to rejoice the Bridegroom. (Canticle IV, 16.) And the dark shadows cast by the tempter on the innocent soul of Imelda were dissipated by a ray from the Sun of Love; and Our Lord shed new graces on His little bride. He led her to remember that her parents were in His safe keeping, that they were strengthened and helped by Him and never left alone, and that He would enrich them for all eternity by their merits gained through bringing up their child for Him and giving her to His service. Then she fell gently asleep in the arms of His Love.

Surely her good Angel, with Blessed Amata and Cecily and the many other holy Dominican virgins who had gone before her into Paradise, leaned down to watch over their little sister, and to adore the Divine Lover who had led His dove to her place in His ark.

CHAPTER III

HOW THE VIRGIN IMELDA LEARNED TO SING WITH THE ANGEL CHOIRS AND TO SACRI- FICE HERSELF WITH CHRIST.

“Till the day break and the shadows retire, I will go to the mountain of myrrh and the hill of sacrifice.”—(Canticle IV, 6.)

“*Ave Maria gratia plena*” . . . a soft murmur of prayer floated through the dormitory where the nuns had just been awakened by the Matins bell. It was after midnight, and according to custom the nuns were saying the Little Office of Our Lady while preparing to go down to choir. Imelda was not called to rise as she was considered too young to go as yet to the night Office, but through the opening of her cell she could hear the Invitatory and the Psalm. She joined her hands and followed devoutly, for Donna Castora had said the Little Office and the child knew it. But soon her eyes closed again, and after the third Blessing, “*Nos cum prole pia benedicat Virgo Maria,*” she once more fell peacefully asleep.

The nuns descended to the chapel reciting the *De Profundis* in a low voice as they passed

over the pavement of the dark cloister, beneath which their Sisters were laid to rest.

Our Lord in the Tabernacle was waiting as always, to welcome His brides and to receive their praises, like the Lover of the Canticles watching through the lattices. They knelt before His Presence ; then asking His help with the Sign of the Cross, they began the recitation of the Psalms.

Some among them were old in religion and had spent long years in the practice of prayer and contemplation ; and thus had learned to enter into the true mystical significance of the divinely inspired words ; others recognised in the Psalms of David the words of their Incarnate God in His Human Nature, and made the words their own ; the novices on their part said the Office with all the eager joy of their first fervour like little singing birds in God's enclosed garden ; they did not trouble themselves overmuch about the exact meaning of each verse, but were quite content to know that they were praising the Beloved. All knew that they were privileged to watch this hour with Him, while the rest of the world was sleeping or indifferent, and this knowledge gave them strength and energy to throw off fatigue and sleepiness to the best of their ability. The rubrics of the Office were in themselves a great help to this, for by due

attention to them each one's faculties were aroused and kept alert.

They recited antiphonally in two choirs, and at the Gloria Patri of each Psalm all rose and bowed profoundly to honour the Blessed Trinity, who filled their humble little church with His invisible Light. The antiphon at the end of each Psalm was like a short fervent commentary on its significance. Then came the reading of the Lessons, for which the nuns remained seated after the Blessing, hearing the instruction thus given to them by the Holy Spirit, taken from the Sacred Scripture or the writings of the Fathers; each Lesson followed by its Responsory like a brief, rapid dialogue between the Holy Church which is Christ's Bride, and the individual soul eager to gather up the precious pearls of divine instruction. Psalms and Lessons were thus alternated by the nuns of the Val di Pietra, until they and their attendant Angels had ended the Third Nocturn, when they all joined with the Apostles, Prophets and Martyrs in the Song of *Te Deum laudamus*.

In the Dominican Order Chapter follows close on Matins: an act of humiliation ever following the uplifting of the soul in praise and adoration; and so all adjourned at once to the Chapter-room which adjoined the chapel, where each in turn accused herself publicly of

every slight infraction of the Rule and Constitutions, receiving with true joy the penances imposed, and feeling the sweetness of having any suffering or humiliation to offer to God.

Outside day was dawning and the cocks crowing—the hour when Christ turned and looked on Peter.

Many of the nuns were still watching when the bell rang to call all to Prime ; some had returned to choir and were kneeling there ; others remained praying before the Crucifix in the Chapter-room ; yet others had returned to their cells, not to rest but to pray in the silence of love to the Lamb whom they followed.

Imelda was not called to rise until day had dawned, together with any invalids and those of the novices who were considered not strong enough to rise at midnight. She had already forgotten the homesickness of the previous evening, and thought all her new surroundings delightful : the silent activity of the Sisters, busy over the day's work, and setting all things in monastic order and neatness ; the sense of bareness and cleanness ; the plain white walls on which the golden morning sun was shining ; the holy pictures here and there ; and the silence and stillness broken only by the sound of the bell calling all to His Presence who deigned to dwell beneath the same roof with them.

The day began with mental prayer ; an hour of silent converse with God, as in Imelda's home in the Lambertini palace ; but now there was no need to seek solitude in the garden, for she dwelt henceforth in the very House of God, and the Voice of her Divine Lover seemed to come to her more clearly here in the enclosure of the cloister, and with a new insistent accent. No longer did He attract her virgin soul merely by sweetness : already " His left Hand was under her head," to subject her to the sweet and light yoke of perfection, and " His right Hand embraced her " in her fervour of love (Canticle II, 6), and Imelda knew that both His Hands were pierced with cruel nails, that her Beloved was indeed " white and ruddy " (Canticle VI, 10), and crowned with thorns. And she implored Him from this first day of her religious life to grant her His strength that she might truly make it a life of sacrifice. Indeed the Dominican Rule meant a series of almost uninterrupted efforts for the little novice : the effort of attention during the Divine Office, where she had to follow each ceremony exactly without as yet grasping the mystic meaning ; the effort of learning the Breviary and rubrics ; the effort necessitated by the manual labour to which she was quite unaccustomed ; the effort of humility when some mistake or

omission brought a rebuke from her Sisters or from the Mistress of Novices ; efforts, too, of exact obedience to every precept of the Rule ; of silence nearly all day ; of continual self-mastery in matters of deportment ; of custody of the eyes. The child gave herself generously to all these small but endless sacrifices, which we are told give to the religious state the merit of a long martyrdom.

And on the second evening of her new life she might be seen returning to her cell, rather pale, but already with something of the radiant serenity of one whose soul is confirmed in the Peace of God.

The days which followed were but little different from the first as far as externals went. Imelda made good progress both in the art of praising God and in that yet more difficult art of self-renouncement. The yoke of monastic austerity seemed to fit so easily upon her that she was soon allowed, at least on special feasts, to rise for Matins and accompany her fellow-novices to offer praise to their Bridegroom "Till the day break and the shadows retire." (Canticle IV, 6.) There in the choir the dawning day would find her, with a heart filled and consumed with love, upon the spiritual hills of prayer and sacrifice, offering to Our Lord the mystical oblation of frankincense and myrrh.

CHAPTER IV

IMELDA'S HEAVENLY FRIENDS

"The watchmen who keep the city found me. Have you seen Him whom my soul loveth? When I had a little passed by them, I found Him whom my soul loveth."—
(Canticum III, 3, 4.)

A SUNLESS winter day with cold rain falling. Sister Imelda was alone in her cell, seated on a wooden stool and spinning with a distaff; but while her small fingers carefully twisted the wool, her thoughts were in Heaven. That morning, there had been given out at Prime the martyrology for the XIIth day of the Kalends of February, the Feast of Saint Agnes, who "on that day triumphed over her tender age and the cruelty of the tyrant." As she listened to the glory of this virgin-martyr of thirteen years old, the heart of Imelda stirred within her; and now, as she sat silently at work, her thoughts were again with Agnes, among the virgin choirs who follow the Lamb in Paradise.

The child needed to strengthen her resolve with the thought of Eternity. Several months had now passed since she had entered the monastery of Val di Pietra; the world and

her home seemed almost as far away as if they did not exist, nor had the fervour of her desire relaxed ; but the first graces of sensible enthusiasm had been gradually withdrawn. Whereas at first the monastery had seemed to her like a lovely garden, all bright with the Divine Presence and wholly peopled by angels, there were moments now when to poor little novice Imelda it appeared to be more like a field of battle literally bristling with crosses.

During the austere season of Advent, she had waited, full of the thought of the holy mysteries of Christmas, for which she earnestly tried to prepare herself, that her heart all decked with love and humility might be truly a cradle for the Divine Infant ; earnestly had she joined in the oft-repeated " Veni " of the Advent Office ; but since the coming of that blessed night, the star of joy no longer shed its sacred rays on her path. For on account of her tender age, she only among all her companions had been deprived of Holy Communion ; when each novice in rank went up to kneel before the Altar and receive Our Lord, poor Imelda had to remain by herself, weeping bitterly, beside the Crib where only a waxen Little Jesus reposed. Neither the Prioress nor the Novice Mistress seem to have realised her need of comfort ; perhaps they thought that a soul at once so simple and so strong did not

stand in need of human consolation. Therefore it had come to pass that Imelda had to seek from Heaven the friendly help which earth did not afford to her.

The bell rang for None. Imelda rose at once, laying aside her distaff and setting all her surroundings in order, she went down to the chapel. As she went, she tried to fix her mind, as she had been taught to do, on the Passion and Death of Our Saviour; at Prime she had thought of Him led before Pilate and Herod; at Terce, as being mocked and scourged; at Sext, nailed to His Cross and crowned with thorns; and now at None she might again kneel before that Cross and pray to Him in the words chosen by Holy Church: "I am very young and despised: but I forget not Thy justifications." . . . "I prevented the dawning of the day and cried: because in Thy Word I very much hoped." . . . "Thou art near, O Lord, and all Thy ways are truth." . . . (Ps. cx viii. 141, 147, 151.)

The cxviii Psalm divided among the Office for the Lesser Hours, made the first half of the monastic day like one continued meditation; and Imelda had already learnt how to enter into it in her childish way. "O Lord," she would pray in her heart, "Thy suffering for us is not all in vain; behold for love of Thee we rejoice to set ourselves beneath the yoke of

Thy law, and we rely with full trust on Thy grace, for Thou wilt never forsake us."

After None all proceeded to the refectory for dinner, and Imelda's thoughts returned to St. Agnes, whose history she much wished to hear more fully. She had a hope that something of her life might be read in the refectory, and happy in this idea she followed to the vestibule along with the rest, reciting the *De Profundis* as they washed their hands, and begging Our Lord to purify them more and more in His Precious Blood. Then they entered the refectory, each one making a profound inclination to the picture of Our Lord in the Cenacle before taking her place.

When the Hebdomadarian ended the Blessing of the Table with the words: May the King of Eternal Glory make us partakers of the Heavenly Banquet, all responded: Amen, and Imelda listened full of hope. But she had forgotten that it was Saturday, on which day the Rule of St. Augustine was always read aloud during dinner. It was a disappointment, but she offered it smilingly to Christ in her heart, and tried hard to listen attentively to the counsels of perfection set forth by the first father of her religious family such long centuries before.

After grace the Community withdrew saying the Miserere as they went; and then came the

hour when the rule of silence was relaxed, and all assembled with their Mother Prioress for a little recreation. Presently little Imelda, flushed with shyness, went up and knelt before the Prioress, whispering some request. Evidently the Mother was not displeased, for she smiled very kindly, and taking the child by the hand led her from the room.

At one end of the cloister was a small, sunny room where no one might go without express permission. Imelda did not know what was inside, and imagined that it must contain something wonderful. It was, in fact, the convent library, an almost sacred spot in those days, when every book was a precious treasure. It was here that the Prioress led Imelda, and telling her to sit down on a small stool, she herself took from the shelves a newly-copied parchment volume called "The Golden Legend." Seating herself near the child, she opened the book at the XXIVth Chapter, and showed Imelda the miniature painted above it, namely, a little virgin-saint in a golden robe, with a white lamb at her feet. Then she began to read aloud from the precious manuscript: "The blessed Saint, the Virgin Agnes, was much wise and well taught. She was young of age but aged in wit. In the thirteenth year of her age she lost the life that the world giveth and found life in Christ Jesu . . ." ("Golden

Legend," Caxton's Version.) The Prioress then read as much of the story as was suited to Imelda's comprehension, and she laid special emphasis on the sublime words in which the virgin-martyr replied to her persecutors: "He whom I love is much more noble than thou, the sun and the moon marvel them of His beauty, by whose touch the dead also are raised to life. He hath placed His ring on my hand, and hath clad me with precious stones and with jewels of gold. He hath set a sign on my face that I love none other save only Him." (From the same).

These words seemed to the child to be so full of wonderful beauty that they brought tears to her eyes. The reading lasted until the end of the recreation hour, and then the Mother Prioress gave Imelda her blessing, and told her to go and rest until Vespers, for this was the time for the siesta.

Imelda lay down on her bed and shut her eyes, with her mind full of pictures of saints in shining robes. She soon fell asleep, and dreamed that she was still sitting at the feet of the Prioress, but when she looked up, it seemed that the Prioress had turned into Our Blessed Lady Herself, with a crown of stars and a bright blue mantle over the Dominican Habit in which she was dressed. Bending down, she asked: "What dost thou desire,

my daughter ? ” Imelda felt no fear, and replied simply, “ I wanted a friend near my own age in Heaven, because I have not one on earth, so I asked to know about St. Agnes.” Our Lady did not speak, but it seemed to Imelda that the Blessed Mother took her by the hand and led her through the cloister, which appeared as though with gilded columns and arches like those in the illuminated manuscript of the Legend, and on either side rows of angels, who were singing Our Lady’s Litanies and the Inviolata. The Blessed Virgin passed on, surrounded with light, as far as the door of the chapel, where the two patron saints of the House were awaiting Her, Saint Mary Magdalen and Saint Dominic. Our Lady then turned to Imelda and said : “ Here, next to myself, are your two most powerful protectors in the heavenly Court. Magdalen sheds down upon you day by day a little of the fire of love which glows in her heart ; and Dominic enlightens your soul with rays from his star ; but since you desire that Agnes should be your friend, from to-day she shall specially watch over you, and you shall be her little sister.” At these words the door of the chapel opened, and the little virgin-martyr appeared, dressed in her golden robe and followed by a lamb : leaning towards Imelda, she whispered, “ I, too, love Christ,” and

kissed her. Imelda was so overjoyed that she awoke. All had vanished ; it was but a dream. And the bell was ringing for Vespers.

But the day which had begun for her rather sadly, ended in the joy of heavenly friendships. Imelda no longer heeded whether she was noticed or passed over in her daily life in the monastery. She had begun to understand how to rise above all earthly affections and so to find rest for her heart. When, as was the custom on Saturdays, the Litanies of Our Lady and the Inviolata were sung after Compline, she felt around her the choirs of angels who praised the Immaculate Queen. And as she knelt in spirit at the Tomb of Christ during her night prayer, she found there her father Dominic, her patron Mary Magdalen, and her friend Agnes ; offering, along with her, tears, perfumes, and the blood of martyrdom and of penance, at His Feet.

CHAPTER V

HOW IMELDA LEARNED TO PRACTISE THE
VIRTUES OF HER STATE AND TO LIVE IN
THE SPIRIT OF THE ORDER.

“ Let us get up early to the vineyards.”—(Canticle VII, 12.)

LIKE the rest of his brethren the Friar Preachers, Fra Egidio Galluzzi was deeply interested in all that concerned the spiritual life.

A rumour had reached the Friars that their nuns of Val di Pietra found his little niece Imelda a really model novice, even the most ancient among the nuns were edified by her goodness. Therefore, impelled by interest as well as by affection for his sister's child, he might have been seen one sunny morning mounting the grassy slope which led to the monastery of St. Mary Magdalen. The larks were singing, a distant bell proclaimed the Elevation of the Host in one of the churches of the valley, and the soft breezes of early springtime in Italy floated across the fair landscape.

Fra Egidio was shown into the convent parlour, and soon Imelda's bright little face

appeared behind the grille. She did not look older nor worn with her austere life, rather it had added a sort of angelic grace to her childish form, clothed in religious Habit and veil.

After asking and receiving her uncle's blessing, Fra Egidio proceeded to give the little novice news of all her family. He told her first how her father and mother were happy and well, and how Almighty God was rewarding them by an increase of peace of soul and of supernatural charity, for their sacrifice in parting with her; of the aunts, who both sent their love and blessing to their niece; of the various good works of the Friars; and finally of his own appointment by Pope John XXII to the Archbishopric of Crete, to which island he was going almost at once.

Then he asked Imelda if she were truly happy in the life she had chosen—the life of one hidden in Christ. Imelda's eyes shone, but she only answered by a very gentle "yes."

Next, Fra Egidio proceeded to question her as to her knowledge and practice of the Counsels.

"Tell me, my child," said he, "how has Our Lord taught you with regard to the practice of Evangelical Poverty?"

"Directly I rise in the morning," replied

Imelda, "I look at Him on the Cross, stripped of everything; and then if during the day a wish to have or to possess anything whatever arises in my heart, I offer it at once to Him."

"And how do you practise the angelic virtue, holy chastity?"

"Father, my heart is given to Jesus. So all day long, whether I work or pray, I try to see Him in every one. When my Sisters love me and are kind to me, I see His goodness in them; and if I receive any humiliation I try to see His love in that also, and to bear it gladly for Him; and so every one helps me to find Him."

"And do you find religious Obedience very hard sometimes?"

"I love it, because when I obey I know quite well that Our Lord is pleased. All the same," Imelda added rather sadly, "I do find it hard when they tell me I must not receive the Sacraments as my Sisters do. But I know the time for them must come some day, if it is Our Lord's Will; and that is what comforts me."

Fra Egidio was greatly pleased and edified at these answers; he began to say farewell, but Imelda detained him and begged him to tell her something that would be a help to her in her religious life. After reflecting for a few moments, the holy Friar began, like his Master, to teach by a parable.

“There was once upon a time a great King,” he began, “who demanded in marriage a poor little peasant girl, who had no riches at all except a Vine, which the King Himself had given to her; and she kept all its fruit for Him alone. On the day of her engagement, she carefully transplanted this vine to a specially enclosed garden, situated on a sunny hillside, above the fogs and mists of the neighbouring valleys. She then set to work to cultivate it most diligently, so that it might bear the very best grapes for the royal table. Every morning she rose early and went to her vineyard, accompanied by three chosen servants whom her Lord had given to her. One of these followed her with a pair of sharp shears, and pruned the branches which she had herself taken care to cleanse from all blight, from dry leaves or from useless twigs; sometimes this servant cut the branches so close to the stem that it made the sap flow out. If the ground was too dry, this same servant would help to water it. The second servant was very keen and watchful, and skilful in catching the thieving birds, or in trapping the ‘little foxes’ who got in and tried to steal the grapes before they were ripe, while his mistress was attending to the roots. The third servant placed supports for the branches, to keep the bunches of grapes from trailing on the ground

and getting dusty and gritty ; and the bride herself was very careful to tie each branch securely to these supports.

“ The day of the vintage came at last, and it was also the wedding-day. The King came down to see the vineyard, where His bride was working. ‘ Open to me, my sister, my love, my undefiled one, ’ He cried, looking at her ‘ through the lattices ’ (Canticle V, 2 ; II, 9), full of love for her. And the virgin ran to meet Him. He gathered of the fruit of the vine, and then the bride went with Him to the ‘ mountains of aromatical spices ’ (VIII, 14), where they might enjoy everlasting felicity.”

“ Imelda,” explained her uncle, “ you yourself are this humble little bride of the Great King of Heaven. The vine which He has given you is your own heart ; the vineyard where you have planted it is this monastery. Here you are safe from the dust and temptations of worldly life ; all around you reminds you of heavenly things ; and the clouds of earthly affections are not allowed to dim the brightness of the light of Heaven ; but, as long as you live on earth you must never let your watchful care relax ; so that at your last hour, when the Bridegroom of Virgins comes to take you to the heavenly wedding-feast, He may find you ready to offer Him the fruit He expects.

“First, you must cleanse and purify your heart and try to be detached from all created things. This is what our first vow, that of Poverty, demands of us. Our Father Dominic commands us to ‘live without any private possessions,’ which means that we should give up for God’s love, not merely our material goods, but also all attachment to our own wishes and predilections, to the remembrance of any past good works, and to our private judgment.”

“Oh, I understand now,” cried the child, “all these natural attachments are the dead leaves and rubbish from which the bride so carefully cleared her vine. But who was the servant with the sharp shears, who pruned the vine which his mistress had already cleansed?”

“She represents,” replied Fra Egidio, “the virtue of Penance, which is so highly esteemed in our Order, because it is so great a help to real detachment and mortification. This virtue subdues nature from its very roots, and makes it more and more spiritual by keeping us from softness and from caring too much for merely passing things. Also, penance enlarges our hearts and makes us generous in our love, besides helping us to holy compunction and sorrow for our sins.

“The vigilant care of the second servant signifies holy chastity; Imelda must protect

her vineyard, that is to say, her heart, from thieving birds and foxes ; which is an emblem of the guard we must set over ourselves to drive away all foolish and vain thoughts and every temptation to self-love ; these things are like mists and cold fogs, obscuring the Sun of Love, which should always be shining on our spiritual garden. A child of Saint Dominic must be filled with holy zeal, and ever desire beyond all else, the sole glory of God, resenting the least shadow of any affection that is not all for Him."

"I have already guessed," said Imelda, "that the supports to which the vine is bound represent holy Obedience ; I know it is the most important of our vows ; but I don't yet quite understand what is meant by the servant who so carefully places these supports for the vine."

"You are right," replied Fra Egidio, "when you say that the vow of Obedience, the only one which we actually pronounce, is the most important of our vows. By it our wills become one with the all-perfect Will of God ; and by it we are bound to our Rule of perfect chastity and absolute poverty. By the third servant is signified prayer ; for by prayer and contemplation we learn to perceive more and more clearly how to become well-pleasing in God's sight ; by this means alone

can we make progress in our knowledge of Him and of His adorable Will ; our faith and love increase until we are in real conformity with the Will of our Divine Lover ; so that even in this present life our eternal union is begun.

“ I desire for you, my child Imelda, that when the day comes for your eternal nuptials with the Lamb, the angels may find your vineyard yielding its hundredfold for the heavenly vintage ; abundance of grapes, ripened by the rays which shine from the very Face of God.”

When Fra Egidio ended his little exhortation, Imelda remained silent, with closed eyes and flushed cheeks.

Presently a light tap on the door reminded her that her hour in the parlour had come to an end. She smiled gratefully at her uncle, knelt for his blessing, and quietly withdrew. And while she returned to her silent cell, resolving to live henceforth according to his precepts as a very perfect Dominican nun, he went forth once more to his apostolic labours, thinking as he went of that verse of the Proverbs of Solomon which so well described the life of his little Imelda : . . . “ Keep the commandments of thy father and forsake not the law of thy mother : when thou walkest, let them go with thee ; when thou sleepest, let them keep

thee ; and when thou awakest, talk with them. Because the commandment is a lamp, and the law a light, and reproofs of instruction are the Way of life." (Prov. vi. 20, 22, 23.)

CHAPTER VI

THE REAL PRESENCE

"I am the Flower of the field, and the Lily of the valley."—(Canticle II, 1.)

IN the garden of the monastery of Val di Pietra, at the close of a day in June, Imelda sat beside a little Calvary which she had herself erected and adorned. She was trying to prepare for the next day which was the Feast of Corpus Christi, by studying the Office beforehand :

"The Angels, Bread is made the Bread of man to-day,
"The living Bread from Heaven with figures does away,
"O wondrous miracle ! though poor and lowly, may
"The servant on his Master feed."

(Neale's translation).

After reading these words in the Hymn for Matins, Imelda's heart was too full to read further. Laying down her breviary at the foot of her little Calvary, she fell on her knees to adore her Lord's unspeakable Love. The flowing rhythm of the beautiful "Sacris Solemnüs" seemed to have given her a sudden new insight into the wondrous Truth given to comfort mankind in all the sorrows of life on earth,

“ God dwelling among the sons of men ” : the same Jesus, who for us was born in a manger and for us nailed to the Cross, now uniting Himself so closely with us, that His Sacred Heart beats against the heart of each communicant, and His Precious Blood is mingled with our own.

Instead of gazing at the Cross of her little Calvary, as she usually did at her times of quiet meditation such as now, Imelda turned her eyes towards the chapel ; through a gap in the foliage she could see the glow of the lamp burning before the Blessed Sacrament. Holding out her arms towards her Beloved, she called to Him from afar, “ Thou who art the Bread of the poor, of the weak, of all in bondage, wherefore, O Lord, should I be deprived of Thee ? If Thou wilt not give me Thy Sacrament here on earth, O send for me to come and contemplate Thy Beauty among the angels ! ”

Our Blessed Lord was not deaf to Imelda’s prayer ; in response to her ardent desire He sent His Holy Spirit, the “ Consolator Optime,” who allowed the little novice to know and realise something of His great love for her ; so that her tears of longing were soon changed into tears of love.

The sun was setting, and his last rays fell on the chapel windows, making them glitter

like jewels, as if a hundred Sanctuary lamps, instead of one, were burning within. Soon the bell rang for Compline, and Imelda rose to join her companions ; and as she went through the garden, she noticed that all the best flowers had been gathered for the morrow's Feast, and felt a wistful envy of those roses and lilies which were to shed their petals and their perfume for the Eucharistic King and die at His Feet.

Imelda obtained leave to pass almost the whole of this night in adoration, a permission which, according to her chronicles, was often granted to her. She had read in one of the Lessons taken from St. Thomas Aquinas : "The Only Son of God willed to make us partakers of His Divinity, and by Himself becoming man, He has made men to be as gods. Moreover, that which He took upon Him of our nature, He consecrated wholly to our salvation." These words of the Angelical Doctor seemed to allow Imelda, as it were, to enter at least a very little into the secret of the Love of the Sacred Heart for us, His redeemed. And with the clear reasoning of a holy and childlike soul, she said to herself : "Since He has given His adorable Body and Blood for us, and condescends to give Himself to us under the appearance of Bread, how can I ever want to keep anything of all His gifts

to me for myself ? No, I must long to give all back to Him." And more fervently than ever did she desire a life of uninterrupted prayer, of sacrifice, and of penance.

When, as the night went on, Imelda's prayer began to be confused and weary, she repeated to herself the Hymn, "Verbum Supernum,"

" At birth our Brother He became,
At table He became our Food :
Dying our ransom He was made,
He reigneth our Eternal Good."

and these thoughts were enough to revive the flame of love in her heart.

Next day, all the bells of the city of Bologna rang for the hour of High Mass. The one little bell of the chapel of Val di Pietra rang also, but its small voice was nearly drowned by the deep tolls and joyous peals that vibrated through the clear air of a perfect June morning.

The Count and Countess Lambertini, dressed in their richest brocades, went together to the Cathedral, where all the great dignitaries and chief magistrates of the city were already assembled, and on their way through the streets they tried to listen for the sound of that bell in the tower on the hill under whose shadow their Imelda dwelt. They did not speak, for their hearts were too

full of the memory of Feasts such as this in the years that had passed for ever.

At this very moment, their little novice stood in her place, with all the quiet dignity of a true nun, trying to follow attentively the words and movements of the priest who was celebrating the Mass. She endeavoured to rejoice along with Holy Church :

“ Praise, O Sion, praise thy Pastor, praise thy Shepherd
and thy Master,
In thy songs and hymns this day.”

She felt her heart vibrate along with the whole of Christendom, as she joined in that wonderful Sequence in which the whole doctrine of the Sacred Eucharist is set forth by St. Thomas Aquinas.

But when the priest, after his own Communion, came to the opening of the choir grille to communicate all the nuns, and when, after saying the Confiteor along with them, Imelda had to remain kneeling alone in her stall, her brave little heart nearly gave way. She leaned her forehead against the wooden ledge on which her gradual rested, and remained in this posture of deep adoration while the nuns returned, two by two, from the celestial Banquet : so as to hide her tears from all.

By and by the Hymn began : *Pange lingua*, etc. “ Of the Glorious Body telling, O

my tongue the mystery sing"—and the nuns rose with a gentle rattling of the rosaries which hung across their white Habits, and, each bearing a lighted torch, proceeded to the entrance of the choir.

There Imelda saw that the priest had entered the enclosure, holding on high the monstrance with the Sacred Host ; the Divine Lover had come to meet His brides. The starry banner of St. Dominic was placed by the Sacristan Sister in the hands of Imelda, so hers was the happiness of walking close to the canopy, and each time the acolytes turned to swing their censers, she might turn with them and gaze at her Lord face to face. The procession started, and the nuns followed, singing, two by two, with downcast eyes.

All the bells of Bologna again began pealing ; through the paved streets of the ancient city the King of Kings passed, escorted by prelates, nobles, and little children all in white scattering flowers. Trumpets announced His coming, and all the waiting crowds fell on their knees.

At the Val di Pietra monastery the Feast was rather different : it was not so much a public triumph as a private and special visit of the Bridegroom to His chosen band of virgins. His passing along the paths of their dwelling-place made it yet more holy ; the cloister, where echoed so many psalms and

prayers ; the chapter-room, where so many little sacrifices were offered at His Feet ; the garden, where they laboured for Him, or where they listened silently to His interior voice.

“ Humbly I adore Thee,” sang the nuns, and the soft unaccompanied chant floated along the ranks. Imelda felt the supernatural joy of the moment ; she knew that Our Lord was truly looking at her with love and tenderness ; her only thought was “ Lord, I love Thee.”

The procession returned, and the monstrance was about to disappear once more behind the choir grille, followed by the heartfelt prayer :

“ Jesus, whom in this life veiled I behold,
Grant what my soul thirsts for with desire untold,
That I may, beholding Thine unveiled grace,
Rest in open vision of Thy blessed Face. Amen.”

Imelda saw the shining monstrance disappear through the open doors ; the Lily of the valley of tears had for this time withdrawn Himself from sight ; but she knew that from Heaven He accepted her homage, the “ Flower of the celestial fields,” who reigns eternally.

CHAPTER VII

IMELDA AS A LIVING SACRIFICE

"I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my Beloved, that you tell Him I languish with love."—
(Canticle V, 8.)

IN the golden days of early autumn, the nuns of Val di Pietra were accustomed to spend their midday recreation hour in one of the many shady green spaces of their enclosure. They used to sit on rustic benches, and while they talked they occupied themselves in some sort of manual work, for thus their Rule orders, saying : Since idleness is an enemy of the soul, and the mother and nurse of vices, therefore none of the Sisters are to remain unoccupied.

One day—the day following the Feast of the Guardian Angels—just as the community were finishing dinner, a travelling friar called, with a letter from the Prioress of the Dominicans of Strasbourg to the Prioress of Val di Pietra. It was a long Latin manuscript, and besides affectionate greetings to all her Sisters in St. Dominic, and news of the various convents in Alsace, it described at length a practice of prayer, taken from the writings of the nuns

of the Rhine country.* (Dominican Nuns). The Prioress opened the letter after grace, and took it with her as she led her daughters to the garden.

Imelda always enjoyed these recreations out of doors ; it was a rest and pleasure to be with her Sisters and to hear them talk, and she always heard something edifying ; but this time her interest was vividly aroused when the Prioress began : " Listen, my daughters, to what the Prioress of Strasbourg tells us, of the method of prayer followed by our Sisters on the Rhine, and in which she and her nuns have lately been exercising themselves ; through union with the Crucified, they endeavour to rise to the peace of the Blessed Trinity." All kept silence, and the Prioress continued : " They desire that their contemplation should be continual, but in order to intensify it, every day at an appointed hour these brides of Christ concentrate their attention, and endeavour to free their minds from all distraction ; prostrating themselves at the Feet of Jesus, whose actual Presence they try to realise. They look back with a rapid glance at all the principal faults and negligencies of their past life, and recall with sorrow their many inconstancies and their ingratitude to their Saviour, with

* " The Mystics of Colmar," specially from their book, *De Adherendo Deo*.

earnest resolutions of amendment ; they then gaze upon Our Lord's Sacred Humanity, and supplicate Him to allow them to place their sins in His Sacred Wounds. They feel then that they may and ought to believe that Infinite Mercy has cleansed them from their sins in His most Precious Blood. Next, leaving all thought of self, they fix the gaze of their soul on the human life of the Son of God, pouring out to Him their praise and thanksgiving. Their hearts are filled with sensible devotion when they dwell upon the humiliations of His Incarnation; the sublime mystery of His Hidden Life at Nazareth ; the weariness He endured during His public ministry ; and the outpouring of His Blood in the sufferings of His Passion ; when they contemplate Him on the Cross, dying in such dereliction for the love of His creatures, they desire to abandon themselves to Him with entire devotedness, to renounce utterly all pride and self-love ; and to accept all humiliation and suffering that He may please to send them during their earthly life, abasing themselves to the very depths before the Holy Lamb of God, and only longing to suffer all things for His Glory."

At this point a childish voice was heard to exclaim : " O Salutaris Hostia, da robur, fer auxilium ! " " O Saving Victim, Thine aid supply, Thy strength bestow ! "—thus inter-

rupting the Prioress' reading. All eyes were turned towards Imelda, who was covered with confusion at having unconsciously spoken out loud ; but the Prioress looked at her with a kindly smile and said : " Our little Sister is quite right ; if we offer ourselves to Our Lord to suffer all kinds of trials, we must never omit to implore His help and to rely solely on Him ; " then turning once more to the letter, she continued reading : " When the soul has thus freed itself from all external objects, and from all trammels of self-love and attachment to its own will, it is possible for it to aspire to a more immediate access to the Divinity. Then it becomes more really united with Christ, and the prayer of such a soul becomes a part of His ceaseless intercession for the human race for whom He shed His Precious Blood ; her charity is increased so as to embrace the needs of all mankind (without forgetting those with whom she is more specially united in the love of His Sacred Heart), whose desires and needs she can lay before His Sacred Feet with an ever deepening confidence.

" What is now required from her is more and more profound immersion in Him who is the Ocean of Light and of Love ; her prayer will thus rise to Heaven with the last sigh of her Saviour on His Cross, thus calling down the good pleasure of the Father. Then finally

the soul becomes wholly immersed in the flood of Divine grace which flows from her Lord's Sacred Passion and Death ; and in the Sacred Wound of the Side of Jesus, losing all consciousness of passing things, she rises to the eternal First Principle. Then begins the Night Obscure, the Dark Night of the Soul, when it rises above the natural powers of human understanding, beyond the bounds of sense ; an atmosphere of silence, of inexpressible calm ; an ever-deepening flood of grace and purity which pours forth a wordless and perfect praise to the Father, the Son, and the Spirit of Love. . . ."

When the Prioress of Val di Pietra had finished translating this account of the very high method of prayer followed by the Dominicanesses of the Rhine country, she asked her nuns to express their opinion on the exercise. Each was allowed in turn to say freely what she thought, for the spirit of St. Dominic is wide and frank, and makes no attempt to chain down the soul to any fixed method, so long as "all begins and ends in God."

A very new beginner among the novices said she never could see why all holy people seemed to advise making a fresh start each day ! If the soul had already risen to the heights of its First Principle, why should it ever come down and begin to rise all over again ?

In reply to this, one of the ancients pointed out "that the mystical union with Him who is our Eternal Good, can only be consummated in Heaven; and while we are on earth this state of blessedness can only be looked for as the reward of our constant and unremitting endeavour. In this present life, a very little is enough to trouble our peace—a slight fault even, or a few exterior distractions, or indeed the fact that it sometimes is God's Will to withdraw from us His sensible favours, in order that we may the better realise our own nothingness. When such things happen to us, we must again turn to Him in penance, confessing our sins and failings, and abandoning ourselves afresh to His Love; and so once more rise with Him to the heights of contemplation."

Another holy and experienced nun remarked that the prayer suggested by the Dominicans of the Rhine might, in fact, be both unreal and very full of danger unless it were borne out in the daily actions of all their lives.

"Yes, indeed," replied the Prioress, "if a nun were to confess her faults with sorrow before the Crucifix and yet refused public humiliations, or neglected to mortify herself daily, how could she enter into the Divine Heart of Jesus? Or again, if one were to remain attached to her own private judgment

or full of self-will, how could she presume to think of rising to these sublime heights of contemplation ? Such souls could but experience a heavy fall indeed, into the depths of their own misery and ignorance."

Several of the nuns were of opinion that the daily meditation upon the Life of Our Lord would fill too much time, and that it would be sufficient to consider some separate detail of His Sacred Passion in order to arouse in their hearts an ardent love and the desire to sacrifice all things for His Sake.

Finally, the mistress of novices suggested that "perhaps the best way would be to arrange the subjects for prayer in such a manner that it could be carried out consecutively throughout the day. Thus: to examine and purify the conscience in the private prayer after Compline; to meditate on the sufferings and humiliations of Our Blessed Lord in His Passion, after Matins; to offer ourselves wholly to Him at Holy Mass during the Elevation and until the Pater Noster; during which time all the nuns are prostrate in silent adoration; and then during the time of our silent thanksgiving after Mass, we can lose ourselves in the living rays of that Sun of Love, the Guide and End of each action of our monastic day."

Imelda listened in silence to all that was

said, while bending over her task of needle-work. She was so quiet and industrious that she might have seemed to those present as if taking little interest in what was said, or perhaps that it was above her childish understanding ; but although some of the language was new to her, and therefore only dimly comprehended, yet in her own way she was perfectly able to grasp the real essence of this practice of prayer : the approach to the God-head through the Sacred Humanity ; and the thought made the little virgin's heart beat with eager desire. Her great purity and heavenly simplicity of soul rendered it perhaps easier for her to take in these thoughts than for some who were older and less unsophisticated.

But she was too deeply humble and distrustful of herself to believe that she could ever attain to mystical union with God by her own unaided effort. Ah, she thought, if only she were permitted to receive the Bread of Heaven ! then Jesus Himself would be there to transform her into Himself by His Very Presence and by His Almighty Love.

After recreation, when the community dispersed to their cells, she asked to speak to the convent chaplain, and went to kneel before the double grille where the nuns went to confession. We do not know in what form she made her humble and heartfelt petition to be admitted

to Holy Communion in spite of her few years ; but it is certain that the answer of the priest was a decided and final refusal.

Henceforth the child's life was one long martyrdom. She persevered daily in the mortification of her body, and fought bravely against the bitter sadness which filled her soul. Even daily Mass, which had hitherto been her greatest joy, the very centre of her spiritual life as It is the centre and liturgical crown of the Canonical Hours, now seemed to her to be sadly incomplete, since she might not partake of the Holy Sacrifice. It seemed as though Our Lord were calling her more and more strongly and insistently, and yet by the voice of His priest He repelled her. She could indeed say with the Sulamitess : " My Beloved put His Hand through the keyhole . . . I arose up to open to my Beloved : I opened the bolt of my door, but He had turned aside and was gone. My soul melted when He spoke ; I sought Him and found Him not ; I called but He did not answer me." (Canticle V, 4, 5, 6.) It was interior desolation, the supreme trial of those saints whom God wills to make like unto His Son in the darkness and dereliction of His Cross. We know not, but the thought arises that perhaps this child almost unnoticed in her own community, may have been chosen from all eternity by Our

Lord as a victim without blemish, offered to the Most Blessed Sacrament. Perhaps her pure heart devoured by spiritual hunger for the Bread of Life, was to make satisfaction before Him for the many careless communions, the many negligences, and all the indifference, of those who disregard the Saviour in the Sacrament of His Love.

Imelda was now allowed to go to confession before each Feast, and thus to bathe her soul in the Blood of the Lamb. Each time she renewed her request, and each time met with a refusal which increased her interior suffering.

At recreation she would sometimes lean her little head against the heart of one of her Sisters who had that day received Holy Communion, and whisper softly : “ How can any one receive Our Lord without dying of joy ? ”

CHAPTER VIII

HOW FAITH TRIUMPHED IN IMELDA'S SOUL

"Turn away Thine eyes from me, for they have made me flee away."—(Canticle VI, 5.)

HOLY Church was singing her Alleluia to her Bridegroom arisen from the dead. Angelic voices responded Alleluia through the blue Easter skies. And Imelda, her sadness filled with divine peace, sang Alleluia too.

It was now two years since she had left the loving atmosphere of her home for the spiritual combat of religious life ; and already she had learned to fortify her soul by Faith, and to live alone with God, even though He had withdrawn from her the joy of His sensible Presence. She no longer begged the priest to grant her Holy Communion, she realised that, humanly speaking, all doors were closed to her desire, and that henceforth her appeal must be made to the Sacred Heart of Christ.

Paschal time was drawing to its close ; Imelda was the only one in the monastery who had not partaken of the Sacred Passover with her Risen Lord, but she was filled with the faith that removes mountains, and thus begged of God to grant her petition.

On the Monday of Rogation Week, she offered herself when Mass began, to pass in the spirit of penance the three days of preparation for Ascension Day, the Feast of Heaven ; and the words of the Introit came to her with a sensation of startling joy : “ He hath graciously heard my voice from His holy temple, Alleluia : and my cry before Him came into His ears, Alleluia.” A strange glad presentiment seemed to fill Imelda’s heart, as she responded with the rest of the choir : “ I will love Thee, O Lord my Strength ; the Lord is my Rock, my Refuge, and my Deliverer.” The Epistle consoled her even more ; reminding her of the Prophet Elias, “ a man passable like to us,” who yet by his faith was able to open or to close the torrents of Heaven. The Gradual, too, sang of God’s mercies ; and in the Gospel she heard the loving Voice of Jesus, saying : “ Which of you, if he ask his father for bread, will he give him a stone ? ” it even seemed to the little novice that He was actually whispering those words repeatedly, as if standing verily beside her. “ O Living Bread,” her heart made answer to Him, “ since my soul hungers after Thee, wherefore dost thou thus delay to satisfy my longing ? ”

The Mass drew to its close ; it had seemed full, as are also all the Liturgical Offices of

Rogation Week, of alternate cries for God's help and praises of His everlasting mercies.

Yet once more the door of the Tabernacle was shut without even a crumb from the Heavenly Banquet for Imelda.

But this time the child did not allow herself to be overwhelmed with sadness ; although the moment for the Divine Gift had not yet arrived, something told her that it was drawing near and was certain. It was as if the Holy Ghost were singing in her heart : " Behold . . . the winter (of trial) is past, the rain (of purifying tears) is over and gone ; the flowers (of joy) have appeared in our land, . . . the voice of the turtle is heard . . . (the messenger of peace) . . . the vines (of thy soul) yield their sweet smell. Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come." (Canticle II, 12, 13.)

During the remainder of the day Imelda performed all her duties with the religious exactitude with which she always tried her best to fulfil them ; but already her soul was far above the things of earth. She was dwelling now on the very borders of eternity, in that region where the voices of earth seem faint and far away, because the chains which bind down the soul to temporal things are already broken. It seemed to the child that as her longing grew in intensity the doors of Heaven half opened to her ; so that she could see

rays of the ineffable glory shining down from Eternal Beauty. To her prayer of "Veni" God was answering with another "Veni," which increased yet more the ardour of her desire. It was an indescribable suffering which consumed the virgin's very life, without in any way disturbing her celestial peace of mind.

Night came ; a warm night and full of the voices of birds and the full life of the Italian spring, when one can almost feel the growth and budding forth of all the green earth under the starry canopy. Imelda went up to her cell after Matins, and tried obediently to sleep ; but all in vain. When she closed her eyes the thought of God came so vividly before her mental vision that prayer and adoration seemed to pour unbidden from her full heart. When she tried, on the other hand, to watch the dawn slowly returning, as she gazed through the narrow windows of the cell at the white disc of the moon, it appeared to her as the picture of a great white Host in the centre of a mighty monstrance jewelled with stars. Then she no longer tried to resist the movement of the Holy Spirit, but gave herself up to silent worship.

After Prime, once more the community went out for the Rogation Procession. Imelda usually loved the monastery enclosure on

account of its green and peaceful shade, but to-day it seemed to her dreary and unattractive. Henceforth, for her all on earth would seem worthless and far away. She was like a traveller returning to his own shores after a sojourn among brilliant tropical flowers and birds under a glowing sky; his own house and garden on a grey hillside appear small and dull in comparison. So, after a night spent in celestial regions, Imelda had become as a stranger on common earth.

She joined, however, with Holy Church in singing the Litanies, calling in turn upon Our Blessed Lord, the Most Holy Trinity, the Blessed Virgin, the Angels and all blessed Spirits, Apostles, Martyrs, Virgins, Confessors. And as each invocation rose to Heaven, there seemed to open round about her vast spaces, resounding with the eternal "Sanctus," and peopled with souls like living stars, each in a special and peculiar way reflecting the Uncreated Light and giving back its rays.

Why must her sojourning on earth be prolonged, since she seemed already to live in God? But Imelda trusted the Divine Love, and told herself: "Perhaps my Heavenly Bridegroom is leaving me here, in order that I may receive the Holy Eucharist before He takes me Home."

During conventual Mass she waited for a

summons from Our Lord to draw near ; but none came : the Holy Sacrifice went on as usual, and there was no gesture from the priest towards the little novice ; no miraculous sign from the Sacred Host. Yet once more, in spite of all, the Communion verse resounded before the closed door of the Tabernacle : “ Ask, and it shall be given you ; seek, and you shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened to you. For every one that asketh, receiveth ; and he that seeketh, findeth ; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened. Alleluia.” (Communion Verse for the Three Rogation Days.)

Imelda was surprised rather than disappointed this time. She thought she had perhaps been lacking in generosity towards Our Lord. So all that day she voluntarily sacrificed the sweetness of extra hours of prayer and helped the lay sisters with some of the harder work of the monastery ; sought out occasions of humiliation ; and begged joyously for even more austere penances than some of her seniors in religion. Such things were not painful but delightful to her ; she embraced all such austerities with an eagerness which transformed them into flames of love and devotion in her soul.

The Mother-Mistress of the novices quite realised that a very great work of grace was being wrought in the soul of Imelda, and she

gave her leave to pray all night before the Altar.

On the next day, the Vigil of the Ascension, was sung for the third time those words of hope : " The Lord hath heard my voice, Alleluia." But the child had no further need of any such encouragement. She was waiting. No longer did she see the priest, but Our Lord Himself : Jesus, Who offered Himself to God the Father for our sins as in Gethsemani ; Jesus speaking in the Epistle and Gospel even as He taught the multitude before the portico of the temple in Jerusalem ; Jesus offering the Sacrifice of Praise for the glory of God and the salvation of mankind ; Jesus Himself turning to His friends and inviting them to be His companions on the way to Calvary : " Orate, Fratres." . .

Now the Saviour bends over Host and Chalice, and in His Sacred Hands they become His Body and His Blood. He knows that without Him, His creatures cannot be truly united to His Love, for only He Himself can supply That for which they hunger and thirst. Therefore He makes Himself their Food, and calls them to Him.

" Behold the Lamb of God." Imelda gazed at Him, saying : " Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldest come under my roof,"—she dared not finish in the words of the priest, and

added : " but speak only one word and I shall receive Thee in spite of my unworthiness."

Some of the nuns went forward in answer to that call, returning slowly with veils lowered to hide the joy shining in their eyes.

Our Lord withdrew from sight ; the thanksgiving prayers began, and all was over. The lights were extinguished one by one, and the choir was left nearly empty.

Still Imelda's faith failed not. On her knees, with eyes raised to heaven, she offered her heart to her Beloved, that He might fill it with Himself, or else that He would take her with Him to the Home of everlasting Love.

CHAPTER IX

HOW IMELDA'S PURE HEART BROKE THROUGH LOVE

"I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that you stir not up nor awake my beloved, till she please."—(Canticle III, 5.)

A SLIGHT movement in the choir, still perfumed with incense, caused the Sacristan Sister to turn round. She started so violently that she almost let fall the Altar-linen which she was carrying, and had to support herself against the end of a stall, so filled was she with awe and wonder at the sight she beheld.

Above the head of the little novice kneeling in her place, one of the Sacred Hosts from the Tabernacle was miraculously suspended in the air. It appeared there of Itself, immovable, and the child with her hands crossed on her breast, gazed at It in ecstasy. No trace of fear or of surprise appeared on Imelda's countenance, only a heavenly expression of intense rapture. If she could have spoken at all, her words would have been of eager welcome to the Friend whose coming had seemed so long delayed.

Soon the whole Community were made

aware of the miracle, and all hastened back to choir ; and the chaplain was summoned to enter the enclosure, where he too knelt before Imelda's Heavenly Lover.

This priest who had often heard Imelda's confession, must have known more than anyone else of her longing for her Lord ; and although he had thought it right to refuse her request, yet he was in no way to blame for adhering to what was customary in those days, and thus postponing the First Communion of this pure soul so early made perfect by Divine grace. If in error yet he was not consciously so ; and Our Lord, while manifesting His Holy Will unmistakably in this miraculous manner, would not give Himself to Imelda save through the operation of the law He had Himself ordained, by the hands of a priest of His Holy Church.

Therefore the priest held forth the golden Paten, and slowly the Host descended upon it. It was held before the radiant face of the child : *Ecce Agnus Dei . . . Then : Corpus Domini Nostri Jesu Christi custodiat te* in vitam æternam. Amen.* And she received Holy Communion.

No voice of chant or organ broke the silence of this wonderful hour, when the Eternal God had visibly come Himself in answer to the cry

* "te" in the Dominican ritus instead of "animam tuam."

of a little child. All the nuns, kneeling round about Imelda, adored Our Blessed Lord there present in her heart, the very air seemed consecrated by the mysterious passage of the Sacred Host, and a wonderful perfume was noticed, which seemed to float from the nuns' choir into the secular part of the church. There also the Divine Presence had made Itself felt, and any of the faithful who were there that day realised that something heavenly was taking place behind the grille which separated them from the brides of Christ.

Some among these, having gathered from the out-sisters something of what had occurred, pressed as near as they could to the screen which hid God's marvellous works from their sight and remained there immersed in prayer ; while others hastened down to the city to spread the news of the prodigy throughout Bologna. Some echo must have reached the ears of Count Egano, for he arrived that same day at Val di Pietra.

The Hour of Sext had long passed by. At length the Prioress gave the usual signal, and the nuns prepared to leave the chapel. Only Imelda remained motionless her face still lit with an ecstatic smile. The Prioress went to her, and gently tried to rouse her, but the child fell back against her shoulder, like a tall

lily against the arm of one who gathers it. She had died of joy at the kiss of Jesus.

The bell of the monastery rang out, strangely indeed : now a knell as for one dead, then sounding joyously for Our Lord's glorious Ascension. For to-morrow was the Feast of Heaven, and to-day Imelda's death-day. Ah, no ; Sister Imelda is not dead : rather, at the very touch of God Himself her life was intensified to an infinite degree, so that the earthly vessel of clay could no longer contain it, but broke and set it free. The dead are those only who die in sin, wilfully repulsing the love of their Saviour.

The choir grille was left open, as was the custom on days of episcopal visitation ; and Count Egano Lambertini appeared on the threshold ; he was allowed to take his little child Imelda in his arms, and it was her father who closed her eyes. If his own eyes were filled with tears, who shall say if they were tears of joy or of sorrow ? He gazed long on the virgin form lying as if in a happy sleep with her hands folded over the heart which had received Our Lord. The slight frame seemed scarcely heavier than when he lifted her on his knee of old after her evening prayer ; he counted the years that had passed : his little daughter was only eleven years old, and already her body was worn with penance. He laid her down

at last on a flower-decked bier, prepared by her Sisters, kissed her for the last time with reverence as for the relic of a saint ; and leaving her, went to break the news to Donna Castora who as yet knew nothing of what had passed.

As is usual in Dominican convents, the holy body of the novice was laid before the choir grille with face towards the Altar. The faithful came in crowds to gaze upon the pure victim of Divine Love, and to implore her intercession ; while the nuns assembled in choir to chant the Subvenite : “ Come, O ye saints of God, hasten hither ye Angels of the Lord, receive her soul and present it before the Most High.

“ May Christ who has Himself called thee, receive thee ; and may the choirs of Blessed Spirits conduct thee into Abraham’s bosom.

“ Rest eternal grant unto her, O Lord, and let perpetual Light shine upon her. . . .” Then pause, and the voice of the Mother Prioress : “ Receive, O Lord, the soul of Thy servant, whom Thou hast vouchsafed to deliver from the prison of this world.” . . . All day long and during the night the nuns succeeded each other beside her whom all believed to be a saint in Paradise, reciting in turn the Psalter and the Office of the Dead. For Imelda all was joy ; but on the other side of the grille

her poor mother wept inconsolably, "because her child was no more."

The date was May 12th, 1333.

The funeral of the blessed child was a poor one as became a bride of Christ. Only the Sign of our Redemption and a few white flowers lay on her coffin. The Requiem Mass could not be sung on account of the great feast, but instead, the Mass of the Ascension, full of the endless joy of Heaven; and indeed it seemed more fitting for the entrance of the little bride into the Home of her Heavenly Bridegroom.

Four novices bore her to her place of rest, while the community followed, chanting Psalm cxvii., the song of victory of the soul set free, which is always sung at the burial of a Dominican friar or nun: "Give praise to the Lord for He is good, for His mercy endureth for ever: . . . It is good to confide in the Lord, rather than to have confidence in man. . . . I shall not die, but live; and shall declare the works of the Lord. . . . This is the Lord's doing, and it is wonderful in our eyes. . . ."

Imelda was buried within the cloister, and during eight days all her Sisters came at mid-day after grace to sing the Libera beside the tomb. They fulfilled this duty, as well as that of reciting the usual prayers, in obedience to

the Rule ; but during the Octave of Ascension it must often have seemed to them that the happy child was smiling down upon them as they prayed for her, and saying : “ I go to my Father and your Father, Alleluia ! to my God and your God, Alleluia ! ”

CHAPTER X

OF THE CULTUS OF BLESSED IMELDA

“Who is this that cometh up from the deserts, flowing with delights, leaning upon her Beloved ?”—(Canticle VIII, 5.)

SCARCELY had the soul of the Virgin Imelda left the earth when she began to be venerated as a saint. The people of Bologna were full of ardent faith, and felt it an honour to their city to have been the earthly dwelling-place of this lily of Heaven.

Almost at once the monastery of Val di Pietra became a place of pilgrimage ; the convent erected a monument near the entrance of the choir, in which the holy remains were enclosed. On it was sculptured the scene of Imelda's First Communion ; and on the four columns which adorned it were represented, on one St. Mary Magdalen, the Patron of the House ; on the second, St. John, the Disciple whom Jesus loved ; on the third, Our Blessed Lady as Queen of Angels ; and on the fourth, Our Lord Himself, at Whose ineffable kiss Imelda had died. The pilgrims came in great numbers, and we are told that many miracles rewarded their faith.

Meantime, those who were her Sisters in religion prayed to her in the intimacy of a closer union, "Whither is thy Beloved gone, whither is thy Beloved turned aside, and we will seek Him with thee"? (Cantic V, 17) their hearts demanded of the pure and innocent soul of their little sister. And their prayer was answered, we doubt not, by many a secret inspiration of love and renewal of fervour, and, more than all, by an increase in those two virtues which had chiefly distinguished Imelda, courage and confidence.

During two centuries the body of the Blessed one reposed in this sepulchre, not far from the Altar where she had offered herself to God.

But during the wars and disturbances which threatened the safety of their monastic home in the sixteenth century, the Dominican nuns of St. Mary Magdalen's Convent were forced to seek safety within the walls of the city. A brief of Pope Pius V allowed them to change houses with the Servite Fathers, who gave up their monastery inside the walls of Bologna to the nuns, going themselves to Val di Pietra to take up their abode in the building made sacred by Imelda's life and death, in A.D. 1566.

Sixteen years later, Cardinal Paleotti, Bishop of Bologna, granted a petition from the nuns of St. Mary Magdalen to be allowed to remove the holy body which they had reluctantly left

with the Servites of Mary. The solemn ceremony of the translation of the relics took place on February 24th, 1582, and the Dominican nuns kept a second Feast on this day, besides celebrating May 12th, as the day of Imelda's death. She had been already added to the special martyrology of the Dominicans, and in Churches and Chapels of the Order the public veneration of her relics had been for many years permitted by the Church.

But it was not until 1662 that her cultus spread to the Universal Church. John Lambertini, a senator of Antwerp, brought from Bologna the authentic history of her life and death ; and an account written by Sassoferato was printed in Belgium ; upon which, various authors both in the Low Countries and in Italy wrote in praise of so gracious a history of the religious life.

The most illustrious representative of Imelda's family, Prosper Lambertini, who became Pope Benedict XIV, officially introduced the Cause of her Beatification, but died before he could complete the work ; and the process was abandoned for a term of years.

Finally, on May 6th, 1826, at the close of the wars which had devastated Europe, the cultus of the little Dominicaness was finally confirmed by the Sacred Congregation of Rites. On the following 16th of December, Pope Leo

XII proclaimed her Blessed, and authorised a Mass and Office for her Feast, which later was fixed for September 16th.

Her relics are still venerated in Bologna, in the little Church of St. Sigismund. They are shown, surrounded by flowers, in a crystal chasse. Above rests a wax effigy of the Beata, crowned with roses and wearing the white Habit of a Dominican novice. She is represented sleeping in the peace of God, as if calmly awaiting the Archangel's trumpet, and the cry, "Behold the Bridegroom cometh, go ye forth to meet Him."

(Some of the relics have been given to various churches and monasteries, one is in the church of the Apostolical College in Rome.)

If any devout pilgrim goes to kneel in the quiet sanctuary of St. Sigismund, after having visited the tomb of St. Dominic not far away, let such a one close his eyes for a brief space to the things of earth, and gaze into the eternal verities.

St. Dominic, surrounded by the saints and blessed ones of his illustrious Order, some of whom bear the martyr's palm in their hands, still sheds over the dark world the light of the Star of Truth.

But Imelda rests for ever upon the Heart of Jesus. She knows His love ; and perhaps she is allowed to whisper into the pure souls of

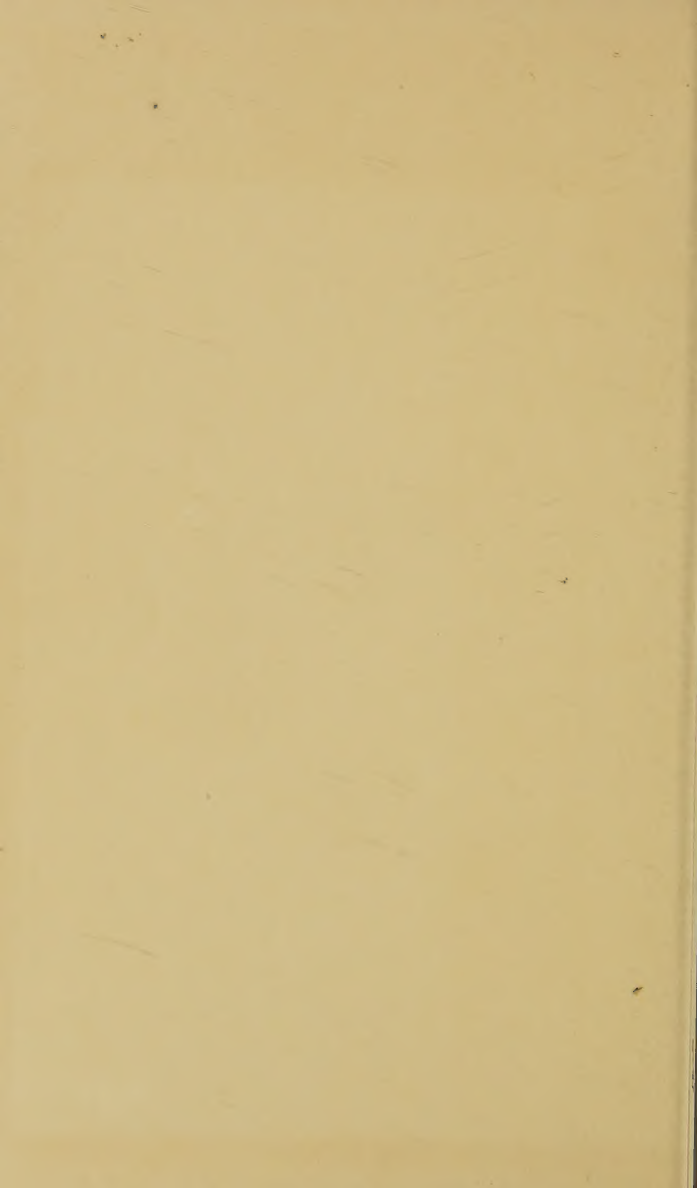
little children the first call from their Divine Friend.

It may be that she visits the earth sometimes, and lingers in empty sanctuaries or near desolate altars ; like the dove sculptured on ancient Tabernacles, softly singing to the Sacred Host that new song which only virgins learn in Heaven.

THE END.

(The details in this last chapter concerning the relics and cultus of Blessed Imelda are taken from a little book entitled *Blessed Imelda*, published with Imprimatur at the Vatican Press, Rome, 1911.)





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